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REMARKS

The Office Action mailed on November 27, 2007 (Paper No. 20071125) has been carefully considered.

The Abstract is being amended, claim 12 is being amended, and new claim 26 is being added. Thus, claims 12-26 are pending in the application.

In paragraph 6 of the Office Action, the Examiner objects to the Abstract for excessive length. In response, the Abstract is being amended to shorten its length. Accordingly, the objection to the Abstract should no longer apply.

In paragraph 4 of the Office Action, claims 12, 18, 19 and 21-25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103 for alleged unpatentability over Hayden, Australian Serial No. 2003901349 and U.S. Patent No. 7,086,198. In paragraph 5 of the Office Action, claims 13-17 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103 for alleged unpatentability over Hayden, Australian Serial No. 2003901349 and U.S. Patent No. 7,086,198, in combination with Tilghman, U.S. Patent No. 986,875. For the reasons stated below, it is submitted that the invention as claimed is distinguishable from the cited prior art so as to preclude rejection under 35 U.S.C. 103.

In the latter regard, claim 12 is being amended to recite that the distribution ring of the supporting structures has a circumference located outside a circumference of the supporting tray of the supporting structures. This is an important feature of the present invention because, in contrast to prior arrangements in general, and in contrast to the cited prior art in particular, it makes it possible with the present invention to place longer cut flowers in the storage space of the automatic flower-selling equipment.

With respect to the cited Hayden reference, it is noted that, on page 3 of the Office Action, the Examiner mentions a "distribution ring" allegedly disclosed in the reference but, in contrast to other elements allegedly shown in the reference, the Examiner does not state a reference numeral designating such a "distribution ring" in the Hayden reference. This is important because a fundamental feature of the claimed invention is that the supporting structure 22 (see Figures 1 and 2 of the present application) comprises two independent elements, the supporting tray 23 and the distribution ring 24. Such an arrangement is not disclosed in the prior art documents cited in the "Related Art" section of the present application, and is also not disclosed in the references cited in the Office Action.

Furthermore, in accordance with the present invention, the distribution ring 24 extends to a point outside the circumference of the supporting tray 23, thereby making it possible to place longer cut flowers in the storage space of the automatic flower selling equipment of the present invention. In this regard, see Figure 1 of the present application wherein (on the left side of the middle portion of the figure) a flower is seen leaning at an angle against the end of the distribution ring 24, the base of the flower being supported by a supporting tray, and the distribution ring 24 extending to a point well outside of the circumference of the supporting tray.

In contrast, in known flower vending machines, such as those disclosed in the references cited in the Office Action, a supporting tray is directly bordered by a structure which has no role other than that of forming a flange along the circumference of the supporting tray so as to prevent stored plants from slipping off the supporting tray. Thus, in known flower vending machines, there is no structure corresponding to the distribution ring of the present invention, and thus no structure having a circumference which extends to a point outside the circumference of a supporting tray, and accordingly no structure

which performs the function of making it possible to place longer cut flowers in the storage space of the vending machine.

To summarize, the invention recited in independent claim 12 is distinguishable from the cited prior art by virtue of the recitation that the distribution ring has a circumference extending or located outside the circumference of the supporting tray. Moreover, new dependent claim 26 further distinguishes the invention from the prior art by virtue of the recitation that the distribution ring has a diameter which is greater than a diameter of the supporting tray.

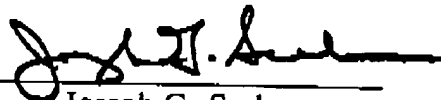
In view of the above, it is submitted that this application is now in condition for allowance, and early issuance is requested. If any questions arise, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned attorney at the below-listed local telephone number.

No fee is incurred by this Amendment. A Petition for Extension of Time with a Deposit Account Authorization is being filed herewith. If the Petition for Extension of Time becomes lost or detached, please consider this paragraph to constitute a Petition for Extension of Time, and charge the extension fee to Deposit Account No. 19-1070. A duplicate of this sheet is attached.

Respectfully submitted,

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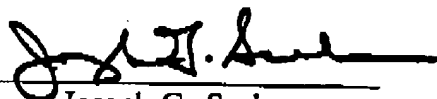
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